

# While You Wait

## A Parent Guide to Navigating ABA Waitlist



## This guide is for families who:

- Have been placed on an ABA waitlist and aren't sure what to do next
- Are feeling overwhelmed, stuck, or unsure how to support their child while waiting
- Want realistic guidance without pressure to “do therapy” at home

Being on an ABA waitlist can feel uncertain and isolating. Families are often left with more questions than answers, long timelines, and pressure to “do something” without clear direction. This guide was created to support families during that in-between period, offering clarity, reassurance, and practical focus while services are pending.



# What the Wait Often Looks Like

Being on an ABA waitlist rarely follows a clear timeline. Some families wait weeks, others months, and communication during this period can feel inconsistent or unclear. It's common to feel pressure to "do more," worry about falling behind, or question whether you're doing enough, even when you're showing up every day for your child.

*Waiting does not mean standing still.*

During this time, progress may look quieter and less measurable. Small moments of connection, regulation, and communication still matter, even when they don't come with clear milestones or feedback.



# What You Can Focus On Right Now



Your Child's Emotional Regulation



Functional Communication



Your Capacity as a Parent

## 1. Your Child's Regulation

A regulated child is more available for learning, communication, and connection. Predictable routines, calm transitions, and safe spaces can reduce stress and support emotional regulation throughout the day.

## 2. Functional Communication

Communication does not have to be verbal to be meaningful. Supporting any reliable way your child can express needs, wants, or refusals helps reduce frustration and builds confidence.

## 3. Your Capacity as a Parent

Waiting is hard, and you are not expected to do everything perfectly. Protecting your own energy and well-being helps you show up more consistently for your child.

**While waiting for ABA services**, it's common to feel pressure to "do more." In reality, meaningful progress during this time often comes from focusing on a few supportive priorities that help your child feel safe, understood, and connected.

You do not need to focus on all of this at once. Choose one area that feels manageable right now.

# What Progress Can Look Like While You Wait

When services haven't started yet, progress can be easy to overlook. Without data sheets, goals, or regular feedback, growth may feel invisible — but meaningful changes can still be happening in small, quiet ways.

## Increased Connection

Your child may seek you out more, stay near you longer, or engage in shared moments, even briefly. These moments of connection are foundational and matter deeply.

## Small Communication Shifts

Progress may show up as new gestures, sounds, eye contact, or clearer ways of expressing needs. These attempts, even when inconsistent, are meaningful steps toward communication.

## More Regulation Over Time

You might notice slightly shorter meltdowns, quicker recovery, or fewer moments of overwhelm in familiar routines. Regulation is not linear, and improvement often happens gradually.



# What Not to Worry About Right Now

When you're waiting for services, it's easy to feel pressure to do everything perfectly or worry that you're missing something important. This page is here to help you release some of that weight, because not everything needs your attention right now.

- ✘ You do not need to recreate therapy at home
- ✘ You do not need to fix every behavior or challenge
- ✘ You do not need to have all the answers
- ✘ You do not need to push skills before your child is ready
- ✘ You do not need to be “doing more” to be doing enough

Support during this season isn't about intensity or perfection. It's about safety, connection, and meeting your child and yourself where you are right now



# Natural and Incidental Learning

Children learn best through experiences that are meaningful and motivating. When learning happens naturally; during play, meals, or routines, it feels safer, more engaging, and easier to repeat. These moments don't require formal teaching, just presence and responsiveness.

Some **examples** include:

- ✓ Naming objects during play
- ✓ Pausing to allow your child to communicate
- ✓ Responding consistently to attempts, even imperfect ones

## Supporting Communication Throughout the Day

Progress may show up as new gestures, sounds, eye contact, or clearer ways of expressing needs. These attempts, even when inconsistent, are meaningful steps toward communication.

## Why Routines Matter

Repetition builds understanding. Daily routines i.e getting dressed, meals, transitions, play, offer predictable opportunities for learning and communication. When routines stay consistent, children can anticipate what comes next and participate more independently over time.

## You Are Not Expected to Do This Perfectly

You are not expected to structure learning, track data, or create lessons. Simply showing up consistently within everyday routines is enough. Therapy, when it begins, will build on what already exists, not replace it.

# Questions That Can Help While You Wait

Waiting often brings a mix of urgency and uncertainty. You may feel pressure to be “ready” without knowing what that readiness should look like. These questions aren’t meant to create more work – they’re simply a way to notice what matters most to your family right now.

- How does my child currently communicate comfort, needs, or stress? My child becomes overwhelmed when expectations change quickly.*
- What helps my child feel safest and most regulated during the day?*
- What expectations feel supportive – and which ones feel heavy?*
- What kind of support do I need during this season?*

As you reflect on these questions, you may begin to notice patterns in how your child communicates, what helps them feel regulated, and how you are feeling during this waiting period. These observations are not meant to change everything at once, but to gently guide how you respond in everyday moments.

When behavior communicates a need, supporting communication in any form; gestures, sounds, AAC, or other methods can help meet that need before frustration builds.

When regulation feels difficult, offering sensory support, simplifying expectations, and meeting your child where they are can make daily routines feel more manageable. And when the wait feels heavy for you, giving yourself grace is part of supporting your child. You do not need to act on every observation or have clear answers right now. Simply noticing what helps for your child and for yourself is enough to support connection, communication, and well-being while you wait.

# Waiting Is Not Standing Still

Waiting does not mean nothing is happening. Growth continues through connection, regulation, and everyday moments, even without formal therapy. These quieter changes matter, and they help prepare both you and your child for what comes next.

- ⚠️ Progress doesn't always look obvious or measurable
- ⚠️ Supporting regulation and communication still matters — even without formal therapy

# Even If It Feels Like You're Behind

Sometimes waiting doesn't just feel uncomfortable, it feels scary. You may worry that your child is falling behind, missing something, or losing time that can't be replaced. Even if it feels like your child is behind, growth is still happening. Development is not linear, and progress does not pause while you wait.



# When You're Ready

[Download our Play-Based ABA Guide](#)

[Explore our blog for parent resources](#)

[Talk with our team](#)